

that the opening closing valve is closed during at least part of the transferring step.

Therefore, by this Amendment, each of claims 1-3, 6 and 9-11 are amended to state that inert gas is continuously supplied to and exhausted from the chamber in which the substrate is present. Support for this feature can be found in the specification at page 10, lines 24-26.

In view of the foregoing, Applicant respectfully submits that this application is in condition for allowance. Favorable consideration and prompt allowance are earnestly solicited.

Should the Examiner believe that anything further would be desirable in order to place this application in even better condition for allowance, the Examiner is requested to contact the Applicant's representative at the telephone number listed below.

Respectfully submitted,



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JAO:PDM/ccs

Attachment:
Appendix

Date: May 16, 2003

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<p>DEPOSIT ACCOUNT USE AUTHORIZATION Please grant any extension necessary for entry; Charge any fee due to our Deposit Account No. 15-0461</p>

APPENDIX

Changes to Claims:

Claims 7 and 8 are canceled.

The following is a marked-up version of the amended claims:

1. (Twice Amended) A semiconductor manufacturing method, comprising the steps of:
 - exchanging a substrate between a preliminary chamber and an external part;
 - subjecting the substrate to predetermined processing in a process chamber; and
 - transferring the substrate through a transfer chamber provided between said preliminary chamber and said process chamber,wherein said substrate transferring step comprises the following three steps:
 - a first step of transferring said substrate, from said preliminary chamber to said transfer chamber;
 - a second step of holding in said transfer chamber said substrate transferred to said transfer chamber; and
 - a third step of transferring said substrate from said transfer chamber to said process chamber, andwherein an inert gas is continuously supplied and exhausted to and from at least the chamber in which said substrate is present among said three chambers at least during a period in which said substrate is present during said three steps of said substrate transferring step.
2. (Twice Amended) A semiconductor manufacturing method, comprising the steps of:
 - exchanging a substrate between a preliminary chamber and an external part;
 - subjecting the substrate to predetermined processing in a process chamber; and

transferring the substrate through a transfer chamber provided between said preliminary chamber and said process chamber,

wherein said substrate transferring step comprises the following three steps:

a first step of transferring said substrate from said preliminary chamber to said transfer chamber;

a second step of holding in said transfer chamber said substrate transferred to said transfer chamber; and

a third step of transferring said substrate from said transfer chamber to said process chamber; and

wherein an inert gas is continuously supplied and exhausted to and from all of said three chambers during said three steps of said substrate transferring step.

3. (Twice Amended) A semiconductor manufacturing method, comprising the steps of:

exchanging a substrate between a preliminary chamber and an external part; subjecting the substrate to predetermined processing in a process chamber; and transferring the substrate through a transfer chamber provided between said preliminary chamber and said process chamber,

wherein said substrate transferring step comprises the following three steps:

a first step of transferring said substrate from said preliminary chamber to said transfer chamber;

a second step of holding in said transfer chamber said substrate transferred to said transfer chamber; and

a third step of transferring said substrate from said transfer chamber to said process chamber, and

wherein an inert gas is continuously supplied to at least the chamber coupled to a vacuum pump among said three chambers and exhausted from this chamber using said vacuum pump during said three steps of said substrate transferring step.

6. (Twice Amended) A substrate processing method, comprising the steps of:
exchanging a substrate between a preliminary chamber and an external part;
subjecting the substrate to predetermined processing in a process chamber; and
transferring the substrate through a transfer chamber provided between said preliminary chamber and said process chamber,

wherein said substrate transferring step comprises the, following three steps:
a first step of transferring said substrate from said preliminary chamber to said transfer chamber;

a second step of holding in said transfer chamber said substrate transferred to said transfer chamber; and

a third step of transferring said substrate from said transfer chamber to said process chamber, and

wherein an inert gas is continuously supplied and exhausted to and from at least the chamber in which said substrate is present among said three chambers at least during a period in which said substrate is present during said three steps of said substrate transferring step.

9. (New Amended) A semiconductor manufacturing method, comprising the steps of:
exchanging a substrate between a preliminary chamber and an external part;
subjecting the substrate to predetermined processing in a process chamber; and
transferring the substrate through a transfer chamber provided between said preliminary chamber and said process chamber,

wherein said substrate transferring step comprises the following three steps:

a first step of transferring said substrate from said preliminary chamber to said transfer chamber;

a second step of holding in said transfer chamber said substrate transferred to said transfer chamber; and

a third step of transferring said substrate from said transfer chamber to said process chamber, and

wherein at least one vacuum pump is coupled to said three chambers, and in this vacuum pump, a continuous gas flow is maintained from an upstream side to a downstream side of this vacuum pump ~~is formed~~ during said three steps of said substrate transferring step.

10. (~~New~~Amended) A semiconductor manufacturing method, comprising the steps of:

exchanging a substrate between a preliminary chamber and an external part;
subjecting the substrate to predetermined processing in a process chamber; and
transferring the substrate through a transfer chamber provided between said preliminary chamber and said process chamber,

wherein an inert gas is continuously supplied and exhausted to and from said preliminary chamber during said substrate transferring step.

11. (Amended ~~New~~) A semiconductor manufacturing method, comprising the steps of:

exchanging a substrate between a preliminary chamber and an external part;
subjecting the substrate to predetermined processing in a process chamber; and
transferring the substrate through a transfer chamber provided between said preliminary chamber and said process chamber, the method further comprising the step of:

continuously supplying and exhausting an inert gas to and from the preliminary chamber during a period in which the substrate is present within said preliminary chamber after the substrate is transferred into said preliminary chamber.